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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Horyaal Journalists Released

REF: NAIROBI 1539

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The two reporters from Somaliland's independent Radio Horyaal who were arrested on July 13 were sentenced and then released on August 9 after paying fines and then paying additional money in lieu of serving time in prison. Another journalist was arrested on August 4 and remains in custody. End Summary.

Horyaal Journalists
Released

¶2. (SBU) Radio Horyaal Director Mohamed Osman Mire and news editor Ahmed Saleban Dhuhul, arrested on July 13 (reftel), were sentenced, fined, and released on August 9. The two journalists were released after paying a fine of 300,000 Somaliland shillings (approximately \$45) each. In addition, each was sentenced to six months in prison. However, Somaliland law allows defendants to "buy their freedom" if their sentence is less than one year. As such, each journalist paid 2.5 million Somaliland shillings (approximately \$375) to secure his freedom. A Hargeisa court had found them guilty on August 6 of operating unlicensed radio station without permission. However, the journalists were cleared of a second count of "airing inflammatory reports which led to clan conflict killings."

¶3. (SBU) Media advocacy organizations, including the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) and the International Press Institute, have issued statements condemning the guilty verdicts against Mire and Dhuhul. Post remains engaged with Somaliland authorities and media outlets in efforts to advocate for free media in Somaliland.

New Arrest

¶4. (SBU) In the meantime and adding to the unfortunate litany of threats to press freedom in Somaliland, Fowsi Saleeban, a reporter for the Somaliland.org website was arrested on August 4 in Burao after reporting on corruption cases involving local officials. Saleeban, reportedly arrested on the order of Burao governor, Jama Abdillahi Biin, was still in police custody and had not been yet in court.

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